

Submitted Testimony of Neal Coenen

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For the
Congressional Field Hearing
On the West Coast Groundfish Fishery Crisis

Before the
Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee

Newport, Oregon
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Senator Wyden, and members of the Committee, thank you for coming to Newport today to obtain information on the deepening groundfish fishery crisis along the West Coast.

This will bring added attention to the crisis and provide a needed opportunity for a wide range of fishery participants and the public to voice their concerns.

For the record, my name is Neal Coenen, and my current position is Watershed Advisor to Governor Kitzhaber, who supports these remarks. Formerly, I was the Marine Program Manager with the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for twelve years.

Because of the expertise and perspective of the invited witnesses, I will not try to describe specific causes or even specific management measures needed to address the crisis. Rather, I would like to speak to the sense of urgency needed to manage the crisis, and Oregon's federal funding priorities to do so.

I think it fair to say that the urgency of directly affected participants is not widely shared outside of fishery management circles. Perhaps that is so because this fishery failure and disaster came on progressively and not with the drama of say a hurricane or flood.

Progressively, incentives have been created to expand the fishery but not modified to limit excesses. Perversely, research on the West Coast was never adequately funded, meaning management risks were high but poorly understood. In part, due to the New England cod fishery collapse, Congress amended the nation's fishery law in 1996 calling for sustainable fisheries. However, insufficient attention, it may be argued, was given to how, in a timely and progressive way, sustainable fisheries might be brought about ... before disasters.

In the context of the West Coast groundfish fishery failure, the need for urgency is that if corrective measures are not developed promptly and implemented, the transition process will be longer and more painful for people than necessary. Outcomes will occur by default not purposeful design. Sadly, Congress and management agencies may only then be able to conclude that the disaster response was poorly planned and executed.

To be sure, many current participants will not find a place in a future smaller, sustainable fishery. However, survivors need desperately to have some idea now that the future will become structured and expectations shaped in the next two to four years ... not a decade or more. Fortunately, the Pacific Fishery Management Council has developed a strategic plan for what specifically will need to be done to manage the transition. Make no mistake, however, that this job will be easy or inexpensive.

As to the resources needed, Oregon has several general priorities to consider as basic starting points.

Groundfish Disaster Outreach Program

With the existing emergency appropriation of \$5 million for disaster relief, Oregon will provide \$1.75 million in federal funds in direct aid for people training to exit the fishery.

We seek to expand the Oregon program to \$6 million for each of four years under the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act where match is not required. The State of Oregon faces a \$700 million budget shortfall projected for the 2001-03 biennium. We have proposed to maintain our general fund groundfish research commitment over this period, but we would not be able to support the match required for an adequate Oregon assistance (\$6 million) program.

Management and Research Priorities

Our second group of priorities include:

1. Pacific Fishery Management Council Support \$500,000

One of the most significant, practical realities of needed change is for the Council to move immediately to carry out its strategic plan. Management measures often take several years to complete. The Council needs added resources for the foreseeable future if progress is to be made developing several management measures each year in addition to routine functions.

2. Observer Program \$5 million

Presently, we understand, \$2 million is funding the start of this program; the original request was \$4 million. Several years of data will be needed before confidence can be placed on usable results. Inadequate funding, a slow start and decreased fishery coverage is not cost effective in the long run. It simply drags out the uncertainty. We request a \$5 million added

annual commitment for a total program of \$7 million. Each coastal state should receive \$1 million to ensure an adequate program and to add a complimentary focus on near shore fisheries research and management.

3. Industry has and will continue to work on Capacity reduction programs. An important point is that some level of significant federal funding will most certainly be needed to create momentum so that a variety of market mechanisms (fees and ITQs, for example) may truly produce desired reductions in capacity.
4. Fisheries Research \$12 million
A starting point would be \$12 million to implement the NMFS Strategic Research Plan for West Coast Groundfish Fisheries. While not the final word on research needs, the plan details the extent of the work required. The sooner an adequate effort is created, the sooner information will flow to improve fishery assessments, recover stocks and create confidence in sustainable management.

Finally, Senator Wyden, thank you again for conducting this field hearing. Governor Kitzhaber's office looks forward to working with you and all members of Oregon's delegation, as well as appropriate congressional committees to address the groundfish crisis.